

Study 0046

Scripture Text: Exodus 25—31; 35—40

In the last study, we focused on the innermost court, or the most holy place. We saw that it was the place that represented God's throne room on earth among His people, and was restricted in access to all, except the high priest only. It was from here that God communicated His instructions and commands to His people.

In this study, we shall continue with our study on the sanctuary by looking at the last part of the tabernacle, the inner court.

The Inner Court or the holy place occupied 2/3rds of the tabernacle (15 feet by 30 feet or about 4.5m by 9m) and had an entrance or door which was covered with curtains. Within the inner court were: (a) a table of showbread made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold, on which specially baked bread were arranged; (b) a golden candlestick or lampstand with seven branches of lamps which was placed opposite the table of showbread; and, (c) an altar of incense which was very close to the entrance into the most holy place. Only the priests who were to minister in the tent were allowed into the holy place, and they had to have gone through a cleansing ritual at the laver in the outer court, before they could even step into the holy place. It was in the holy place that the priests had to regularly minister before God. Today's believers in Christ are all priests; hence, we are called to minister before God on a daily basis, not only on Sundays.

We now turn our attention to the significance of the items of furniture in the holy place.

The showbread, which was placed on the table of showbread, was specially baked unleavened bread which had to be replaced every Sabbath (**Leviticus 24:5-9**). The bread so replaced was eaten by the priests in the holy place, and any leftover was burnt. The bread was placed in two rows of six loaves each, and is believed to represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was called the showbread or literally, 'bread of the face (s)' or 'bread set before the face of God' or 'bread exhibited before the presence of God'. In modern translations, like the **NLT**, it is referred to as 'bread of the presence' as in the presence of God. *Smith's Bible Dictionary: Comprising Antiquities, Biography, Geography, Natural History, Archaeology and Literature*, states: "The title "bread of the face" seems to indicate that bread through which God is seen, that is, with the participation of which the seeing of God is bound up, or through the participation of which man attains the sight of God whence it follows that we have not to think of bread merely as such as the means of nourishing the bodily life, but as spiritual food as a means of appropriating and retaining that life which consists In seeing the face of God." The significance of the bread is nowhere explicitly described in scripture, but we can infer the following:

- (a) God was constantly watching over His people to protect them; which also meant that His people had to exercise caution in their daily walk as God's watchful eyes was on them (**2 Chronicles 16:9; Proverbs 15:3; Jeremiah 16:17**).
- (b) It was spiritual food for the edification of the priests who ministered before God, for no man can serve God on natural food only (**Deuteronomy 8:3**).
- (c) The weekly replacement of the showbread could signify the freshness of God's strength to His ministers to be able to serve Him acceptably.
- (d) The showbread could also point to Christ as the bread of life, which gives life to them that eat it. Thus, the priests could be said to engage in, as it were, weekly communion with God as they ate of the showbread, burning off whatever was not consumed after one day.

- (e) The showbread was considered most holy and would make whatever it touched holy, hence, only the priests who were to go through purification rites everyday were qualified to eat it. This was thus required of David and his men when they fled from King Saul (**1 Samuel 21:1-9**). Today, Holy Communion should only be taken by those who have purified themselves through the sanctification of the Spirit and the word of God!

The Candlestick or the lampstand having seven branches, and set opposite the table of showbread, was made of pure gold, and provided illumination in the holy place, thus enabling the priests who ministered before the Lord to see what they were doing (**Exodus 25:31-37; 35:14**). The light of the candlestick was never to go out, save when it was trimmed every morning, and specially produced oil was constantly poured to feed the candlestick so that it would continue to burn (**Exodus 27:20-21; Leviticus 24:4**). Without the candlestick, the holy place where the priests were to minister before God would be dark, as there was no provision for windows in the tabernacle. In **Zechariah 4:1-7, 11-14**, the bible tells us that the candlestick and the supply of olive oil represents the grace of God given to His ministers for the work of ministry. Thus, the priests not only received illumination for the work, but also abundant grace, for no man can accomplish anything for God, apart from the grace of God. The trimming of the lamps suggests the renewal of God's grace each day (**Lamentations 3:22-23**).

The Altar of Incense (**Exodus 30:1-10**) was the third and final piece of furniture item in the inner court, and was positioned between the table of the showbread and the golden candlestick, but next to the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold. On it, the priest burned incense every morning and evening, when he dressed the lamps of the candlestick (**Exodus 30:34-38**). There was to be no burnt offering or meat offering burnt on this altar, neither was any strange (foreign) incense burnt thereon, save that which was recommended (**Exodus 30:34-38**) to be burnt (**Leviticus 10:1-2**). On the Day of Atonement (once a year), the blood of the atoning sacrifice was put on the horns of the altar of incense, thereby making atonement for the altar. The altar of incense represented the place where the prayers, praise, and worship of the people of God was offered by the priest on behalf of the worshipper standing at the door of the tabernacle. The priest would afterwards come out and declare to the worshipper that God had heard or accepted his petition, and sometimes would bring a word to the worshipper at the door. Thus, the priest acted as an intercessor on behalf of the people in bringing their heart's petition to God (**1 Samuel 1:9-18**). Furthermore, the smoke and fragrance of the regular incense represented God's glory filling the holy place as well as God's pleasure in what was being done in the sanctuary.

The inner court could thus be said to be the place of holy service/ministry to God. It was there that the priests performed their daily service of trimming and lighting the lamps, arranging the showbread in order, and offering prayers, intercession, praise, thanksgiving, and worship unto God. It was the place where God's abundant grace, mercy, and illumination, was made available to the priests who ministered in the holy place. It was the place where the sacred items of fellowship and communion were consumed by the priests; that is, it was the place where the priests received spiritual nourishment from God.

EXERCISE

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. The inner court and the holy place are one and the same.
2. The inner court was a place restricted to the priests only.
3. The inner court was where the priests received nourishment from God.

4. The inner court was the place where the showbread, the candlestick, and the altar of burnt offering were located.
5. The showbread was God's provision of spiritual nourishment for the priests.
6. The candlestick was God's provision of grace for the ministry of the priests.
7. The priest of the Old Covenant Era was an intercessor.
8. The bread of communion was eaten weekly by the priests and their families.
9. Incense represented the prayers of God's people, hence any incense would do.
10. The inner court was the place of divine service by the priests.